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Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals

Results of the consultation on the CES Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on the draft Declaration on the role of National Statistical Offices in SDG monitoring. Thirty two countries responded. Countries supported the adoption of the Declaration and provided comments and suggestions for improving the text.

The text of the Declaration has been updated to take into account the comments received.

I. Introduction

1. This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the draft Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in SDG monitoring.
2. The following thirty two countries responded: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.
3. Many countries explicitly mentioned that they support the Declaration. No country opposed to adopting the Declaration. Finland pointed out that it would be good to discuss the general questions around the role of NSOs in SDG monitoring before adopting the Declaration.

II. Comments on the formulation

A. Preferences for the wording: ‘lead’ or ‘contribute’

4. In the draft text sent for comments, two alternative wordings were proposed:
 - (a) Para 7: “*We declare* that the national statistical offices are committed to [*‘provide a leadership role and offer’ / ‘contribute’*] their expertise to measure SDGs in a professional, independent and impartial way.”
 - (b) Para 8: “We are *committed to*: (a) [*‘Lead’ / ‘Contribute actively to’*] the measurement of SDGs through a focused set of indicators that are limited in number, based on a systematic framework and relying on high quality statistics;”
5. Seventeen countries preferred to use the word “contribute” and eight countries preferred to use the word “lead”. One country (Romania) suggested using the word ‘coordinate’ in both cases. The remaining countries did not express an opinion.
6. To be inclusive and to have a text that is acceptable to all CES members, the final draft in document ECE/CES/2015/45 therefore uses the word **‘contribute’ in para 7 and ‘contribute actively’ in para 8.**

B. Other suggestions for improving the formulation

7. Some other suggestions to improve the formulation were also proposed, as follows:
8. **Hungary** proposed the following new formulation for paragraph 8 (d): “Engage effectively with data producers within the official statistical system with the contribution of civil society, academia and the private sector to fill data gaps, and provide advice on methods to ensure high quality of data that are produced”.
9. **United Kingdom** and **Sweden** suggested changes to paragraph 6 as follows: “Call upon national governments to support national statistical offices in their key coordinating role in measuring and monitoring SDGs in countries, bearing in mind the critical role of high-quality official statistics in informed decision-making”.
10. Both corrections have been included in the text.

11. In addition, several countries suggested minor editorial corrections, which have been taken on board.

III. General comments on the text

12. The general comments by countries were taken into account in the final text as much as possible. The following comments were made:

13. **Australia:** Recall the *A World that Counts* report developed by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. ABS would like to see this report more explicitly recognised than as part of the note recalling the working groups of the Secretary General.

14. Recognise the importance of the work of international agencies with their technical expertise and coordinating roles for measuring and monitoring the achievement of the SDGs at the regional and global level.

15. Include a commitment to support the work of the newly formed UNSC IAEG-SDGs in the declaration. The ABS would like to further acknowledge the need for agencies acting in this space to avoid establishment of activities that cut across or duplicate the work of the IAEG-SDGs.

16. **Brazil:** The basic principles we support:

(a) The NSO has the leadership of this process;

(b) The regional UN offices have the role to be the locus for the regional discussion, establishing a bottom-up working process;

(c) The indicators must be constrained to a reasonable number with the possibility of being calculated in an appropriate period of time.

17. **Chile:** These proposals are based on the experience of MDGs definition and the limited participation of the NSOs, we consider that this situation was a serious gap and imposed limitations for evaluation and measurement.

18. In the case of SDGs, the situation is truly different, with active participation of the NSOs from the starting point of the SDGs definition; we can ensure an appropriate involvement of the NSSs in the follow up information for the SDGs indicators measurement. This position will only be possible with a leadership role, not as a contributor role in the NSS.

19. **Czech Republic:** We support the declaration. The Czech Statistical Office takes note of the activities associated with the post-2015 agenda. We agree with the conclusion that its implementation requires the coordinating role of national statistical offices and strengthening of their capacities. We are, however, missing in the proposed declaration more significant reference to the benefits of this agenda for particular users and especially more thorough definitions of the roles of the OECD, Eurostat and other international agencies and institutions. This moment is important particularly due to the fact that, both in the European and global scale, data are brought also by non-traditional ways of surveying and measuring going beyond national borders.

20. **Estonia:** Comment on paragraph 7: National statistical offices can not measure SDG, they can measure only SDG indicators. Are SDG and indicators same in this context?

21. Comment on paragraph 8 (c): "Support the new post-2015 development agenda by developing broader measures of progress that will be needed for analysis of sustainability in the long term". Who is developing broader measures of progress? Statisticians?

22. **Finland:** We had a lively discussion in Statistics Finland on the Declaration document. Some of the discussion showed that there is quite a lot to do inside the office to inform people on what is going on with the SDG's. One general concern especially about the Declaration was that do we really know at the moment what we will commit us. The work on the indicator list in the statistical working group has just begun. We do not know the result and we do not know the final decision on the list that will be made after the statisticians have done their part of the preliminary work. I think that's something we need to discuss.

23. It is certainly useful that we have some common understanding what kind of role NSI's could preferably have in the monitoring process nationally. But in general there should be left room for national differences since the situations with the role of the NSI's can be so varied nationally.

24. What I am trying to say is that instead of formulating the text of the declaration we should ask more general questions and discuss those kinds of items first.

25. **Hungary:** According to the related principles of official statistics (the UN Fundamental Principles as well as the European Statistics Code of Practice for the National and Community Statistical Authorities, 2011): 4. Commitment of quality; 5. Statistical confidentiality; 7. Sound methodology; 12. Accuracy and reliability; 14. Coherence and comparability – we presume that the adequate and responsible way of measuring Sustainable Development Goals derives from official data. That is why we propose a reformulation in para 8 (d).

26. **Japan:** [As reasoning why Japan finds the wording “contribute” appropriate to use in the Declaration:] In many cases, the data for measuring the SDGs has various monitoring data, etc., that are not under control of national statistical offices. Therefore, it seems rather difficult for many countries to take leadership role in measuring the SDGs.

27. **Latvia:** Bearing in mind that governments across the world are aware of the fundamental importance of the measurement of sustainability regarding society, economy and environment, we approve the draft document in general. However, we have to underline that in Latvia the key coordinating institution for monitoring sustainable development is Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia is only involved as one of data providers.

28. **The Netherlands:** It is also necessary to emphasize that building statistical capacity, implementation of the post-2015 agenda and the measurement SDGs is only possible when there are enough financial and human resources available. Maybe an alinea can be inserted after the sentence starting with “call upon national governments ...”.

29. **Norway:** We would additionally like to emphasize that point 8 (a) is a desired outcome of the process, but we acknowledge that it will be very demanding. And based on the dialogue we have with our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who leads the negotiations of goals and targets from the Norwegian side, the impression is that measurability is regarded as a desirable characteristic in the negotiation process, but not a strict criterion in the selection of goals and targets. It is possible that for some countries less measureable targets in sensitive areas may be preferable. If this is the case, it will represent a challenge when deciding on indicators as long as this is not a pure technical process.

30. The international statistical community should also be clear about what will be within the realm of official statistics and what is outside the scope of what national statistical systems should be held responsible for reporting. Some proposed indicators are of a “non-statistical” character.

31. **Romania:** In our opinion, neither the assuming by the NSO of the role of "leadership" nor the assuming of the role of "contributor" in the process of measuring and

monitoring the SDGs fits the general role national statistical offices play within their national statistical systems. Let us explain!

32. If NSOs were to undertake the role of leadership in the above matter, it would mean too much responsibility and, in particular, their empowerment beyond the role given by national statistical laws. Under such circumstances, NSOs: (a) would be put in the situation to go beyond their real duties and tasks according to which their potential is limited to producing certain data by themselves and to collecting some other data from other producers of statistics; (b) should address the Parliaments or other bodies, asking them to insert some particular prerogatives linked to the above in their statistical laws; this would double the current status of NSOs as "coordinators" of the National Statistical Systems. The term and activities included under such concept are, on the other hand, too vague and deprived of consistency.

33. Following the above arguments, we believe that the most suitable alternative to be used is that of "coordinator" for measuring and monitoring the SDGs, which will certainly match the status adopted following the international recommendations in this respect. Naturally, assuming the role of coordinator with a certain underlining, focusing and framing of concrete tasks will meet both the requirements addressed to NSIs, on the one hand, and the capability and legitimacy to cope with such responsibilities, on the other hand.

34. **Sweden:** Sweden supports the 'contribute' alternatives. In the interest of ensuring our good relations with the Swedish government, we would also prefer to replace the word 'strengthen' in the 6th paragraph with the word 'support'.

35. **United Kingdom:** [The reasoning behind the suggested wording in paragraph 6 of the Declaration:] We are keen to avoid political difficulties in calling on our governments to strengthen the NSOs, but we feel the general intention could be expressed less controversially with the change of language we suggest. We would also like to ensure that the text best reflects the full variety of the nature of decentralisation/ subtleties in the role of the NSO in the ECE region.

IV. Proposal

36. Given the support by countries, the Conference is invited to endorse the Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in SDG monitoring.
